DEVELOPING NEW WAYS FOR THE STUDY OF
ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH:

A PROJECTIVE APPROACH TO THE
PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

#3

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How does one measure the "goodness" of an organization? This is a question with a multitude of answers - perhaps with more answers than we might wish. The concept of organizational "goodness" comes in many guises and with many shades of meaning.[1] There are conceptualizations of "organizational health" (Bennis, 1962), with stress on adaptability, identity and accurate perception of the environment; there are concepts of the "Eupsychian" organization (Maslow, 1965) with emphasis on the unfolding of individual and systemic potentialities, and, of course, there are the many traditional criteria of productivity, profitability and formal goal-attainment.

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[1] We use the term organizational "goodness" as the most general, generic concept, defining any positive organizational process or outcome whatever. Thus it subsumes concepts such as "organizational effectiveness", "organizational health", "organizational success" and the like.

It is evident that, on theoretic as well as practical grounds,   we must learn to live with a multiplicity of measures of adequacy of organizational functioning. Some of these may appear to be "hard" and specific, such as dollars earned. Others may prove to be "soft" and difficult to isolate, such as people's personal assessments of what is "good" or "bad" about their private, deeply-experienced organizational worlds.

While there are many ways for ordering criteria of organizational "goodness", we shall provide here a simple classificatory schema, to be covered in greater detail in a separate paper:

CLASSIFICATORY SCHEMA: THE MEASUREMENT OF

ORGANIZATIONAL "GOODNESS"

Criterion Type	Criterion　　　Time	At a Given Time	Over a Period of Time
Systems Criteria	systems financial	1	2
	systems performance	3	4
Person Criteria	member perception	5	6
	non-member perception	7	8
	member action	9	10
	non-member action	11	12

Illustrating the above, the following are examples of possible entries in cells 1-12:

1. "corporate income last month";

2. "long-term profitability of corporation";

3. "does the bird fly?";

4. "what has been the trend in the performance of successful tests during the last several years?";

5. "according to the most recent survey, how do engineers and scientists look at their organizations, particularly in evaluating the organizations' "goodness"?";

6. "what are long-term trends in the feelings of engineers and scientists about their organizations?";

7. "according to the most recent survey, what do customers or clients think about the organization?";

8. "over the last several years, what has been the firm's reputation?";

9. "what has been the absenteeism record last week?";

10. "what has been the long-term trend in absenteeism?";

11. "are people buying the product these days?";

12. "what are the long-term sales trends?".

In addition, one may conceive of a set of six entries, considering some time period in the future, containing forecasts of criterion measures.

Clearly, one may expect patterns of intercorrelation among various criteria, and consistencies as well as

fluctuations over time. For instance, a history of performance of successful tests by a research and development organization (cell 4) is likely to be associated with a good reputation in the minds of clients and public, (cell 8), and this in turn may relate to increased sales and contracts (cell 12), and to long-term profitability, (cell 2). Further, some criteria may be both symptoms and causes of outcomes on other criteria: e.g. excess absenteeism or turnover, (cells 9 and 10), may be an indication of internal stress, and in turn may act as a cause of further stress, ultimately leading to negative feelings inside and outside the organization, (cells 6 and 8), and to poor organization performance, (cell 4).

The research reported relates to cell 5, (and potentially to cell 6 and to forecasts of future conditions of organizational "goodness"). It examines organizational functioning in terms of the way in which research scientists, administrators and engineers experience the organizations in which they work. A vast literature is available, probing by means of questionnaires and other more-or-less objective testing devices how people feel about the companies that employ them. Many of these techniques are highly elaborate,

some even including approaches to assess the "truth-
fulness" of the respondent's answers. It is our
belief that a significant measure of organizational
health (viz. adaptability, identity, accuracy of
perception, etc.) can be evolved through the study
of deeper, often hard-to-verbalize feelings of organ-
ization members concerning their organizations. We
base this view on the concept that some aspects of
experiences that matter most in our lives, including
our sense of being part of a job environment, simply
are hard to put into words, especially in the usual
question-answer manner of the typical attitude
questionnaire. Even if the respondent makes every
effort to reply honestly, there remain some aspects
of his attitude (a) that are relevant in the particular
case, but that are not included in the question-
answer type research instrument, and (b) that he
cannot readily elicit from the deeper levels of his
awareness without the aid of more deeply-searching
study approaches.

To this end, we report here the nature and results
of a preliminary inquiry, using a selected number of
Rorschach plates (inkblots used in the Rorschach test)
as devices for drawing forth feelings about organi-
zational life that, in part, may be lodged below the

surface of the respondent's usual conscious awareness. Our subjects are a group of 26 engineers, scientists and administrators, employed by a variety of Southern California firms, primarily in the aerospace field, including Lockheed, North American, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Douglas Aircraft, Hughes, General Dynamics, RAND and a scattering of others, as well as a number of informal control cases. It must be clear that this is not intended as a systematic investigation, but rather constitutes our effort to explore preliminarily the possibilities of devising a relatively novel approach to the study of organization perception.

In substance, as part of a larger design incorporating other projective devices, a semantic differential, the Buhler-Coleman Life Goals Inventory and open-ended interviewing concerning self-image and organization image, each respondent was asked, by means of a series of comparisons, to indicate which of eight Rorschach blots more (and less) resembled the company.

The results of choices expressed appear in Table I. (The Rorschach plates are shown as Exhibit A).

T A B L E I

RANKING: WHAT RORSCHACH BLOTS MOST RESEMBLE THE

COMPANY?

(Numbers in Table are blot numbers, revised)

Rank	Aerospace (et.al) Company Consensus	Company Group					Students
		a	b	c	d	e	
First	8	6	8	8	8	8	3
Second	6	8	5	6	6	6	7
Third	5	7	6	2	2	5	1
Fourth	3	4	3	1	5	4	2
Fifth	7	3	2	5	3	1	5
Sixth	2	2	7	3	7	7	4
Seventh	4	1	4	7	4	3	6
Eighth	1	5	1	4	1	2	8

Rankings determined by weighted choice patterns

of respondents.

Student responses elicited with respect to
"statistics course" as organization system.

The Rorschach Miniature Ink Blots in Color: A Location and Record Form
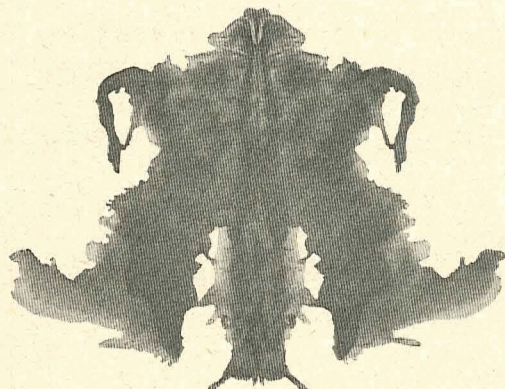
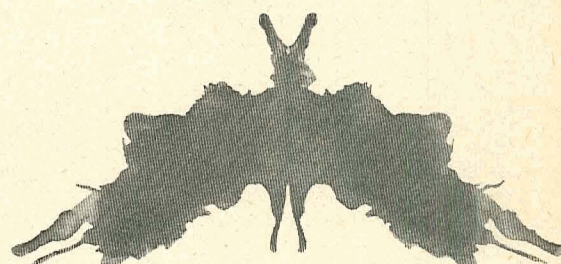(Blots without circled numerals
not used in
this study)

I

II ③

III ⑤
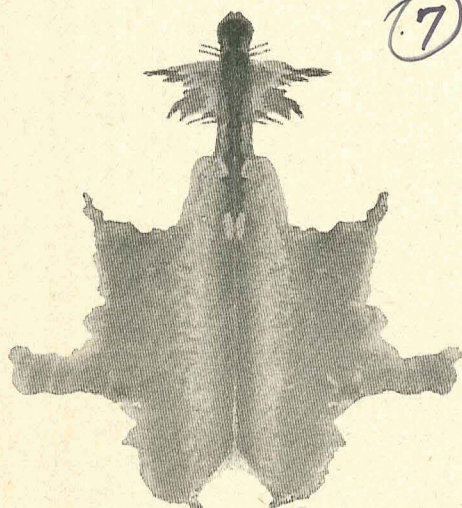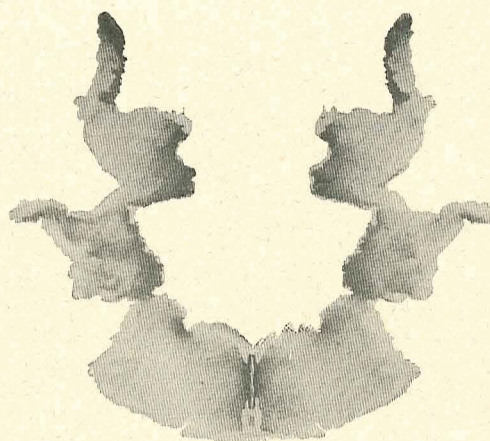
IV ⑦

V ①

VI ④

VII ②

VIII ⑥

IX

X ⑧

The Rorschach Miniature Ink Blots in Color: A Location and Record Form

By Morse P. Manson, Ph. D.
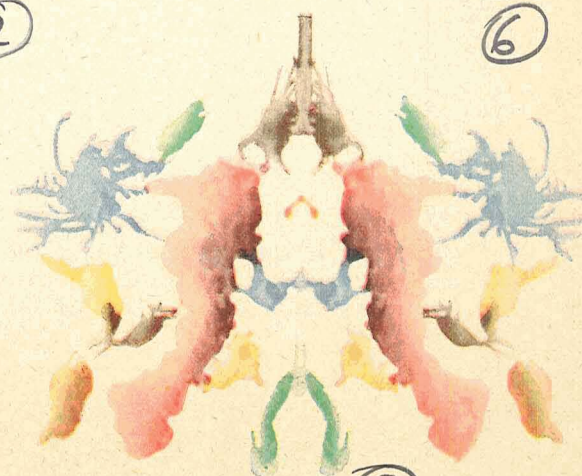
		Agency		
		Date		
Name		M-F	W-N	S-M-D-Sp-W
Address		Telephone No.		
Birth	Age	Mo. L-D-X	Fa. L-D-X	Br.	Si.	R. O. Birth
School		Yrs. Educ.		
Occupation		Organiz.		
Position or rank				
Referred by				

RORSCHACH SUMMARY AND PROFILE

No.

H
Hd
A
Ad
AObj
At
Sex
Obj

N
Geo
Art
Arch
Embl
Clds
Bld
Fire
Mask
Abs

Expl.

Total R

Reaction Time
(I, IV, V, VI, VII)

Reaction Time
(II, III, VIII, IX, X)

F %
F+ %
A %
P %
O+ %
O— %
W : M
M : C
M : FM
C+CF : FC
(H+A) : (Hd+Ad)

Number of responses

25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

| W | W^x | Z | D | Dd | d | S | | M | FM | Fm | m/mF | FK | K/KF | F | Fc | c/cF | FK | k/kF | FC' | C'/C'F | FC | CF | C | Cn/Cdes/Csym | Ctn | Rj |

No. +
No. —
TOTAL

SUCCESSION		RIGID		ORDERLY		LOOSE		CONFUSED	
APPROACH		W %		D %		Dd %		S %	

Though in view of the exploratory character of
the study statistical tests are relatively without
meaning, it is apparent that sharp differences exist
between the student group and the consensus of the
aerospace group. Further, particularly at the positive
side, respondents in the several clusters of companies
appear to be in considerable agreement as to the ink
blot that is most like the company for which they
work; here are some of their comments, concerning
blot 8:

> * This looks most like company; it's
>   colorful in itself; it's interesting
>   as the company is; it's extremely varied
>   in picture it portrays; that is also
>   true. Formless in sense it doesn't
>   look like anything, and company doesn't
>   look like anything I've seen before.
>   Don't misunderstand. I think this
>   is good.

> * Closely approximates reasonable pyramid.
>   Odd colored portions flaring out reminds
>   me of various staff groups that serve the
>   ongoing line organization that are
>   arranged in pyramid-type structure.

* More complicated structure; more
  representative of X-company and other
  companies with large number of different
  people with different motivations.

* A big splatter of blue, an amorphous
  group, lacking in substance; might have
  seen variedness in program we have.

* Variation of color tends to remind me
  of diversity of organizations involved
  in project; deal with several different
  organizations within company. Pink would
  be one administrative division; yellow
  another. The thing that is holding
  this thing together seems to be a very
  fine line.

Here are some characteristic comments concerning
blot 1:

* This is very dull; mechanical pyramid with
  two people on top fighting for the top job;
  we aren't like that.

* A black bat; very even color throughout;
  may be a rough sketch for a prototype;
  doesn't mean much else.

* This looks more like an old-time buggy factory; (not at all like the complicated outfit that we are); I don't like this one; too drab.

* Kind of tightly-knit, organized; but X-company is not this tightly knit; we've got all sort of people trying different things; sometimes they get in each others way, but in the long haul, things work out.

The following are a few comments concerning two other blots:

Blot 5 * Too open in the middle, no convergence at the top; too much pulling apart; red blotches don't represent anything; dis-pleasing, discordant, disordered, too many contrasting colors.

Blot 5 * Looks like people; there are even some completely independent activities.

Blot 2 * Congenial atmosphere with some chaos; looks like two people laughing at each other; reminds me of loosely assembled and unconnected parallel efforts - open loop.

Though we can make no substantive statements concerning the efficacy of the method at this stage, we conclude that the use of Rorschach plates as means for exploring perceptions of organizations merits further consideration. In designing systematic studies, we shall be guided by a series of theoretic and pragmatic propositions, all subject to empirical test:

(1) Rorschach blots are capable of eliciting responses concerning organizational perception which tap qualitative "feeling" variables relating to the person's reaction to the organization.

(2) These feeling variables cannot be verbalized with equal ease in response to direct, structured inquiries, although they will bear systematic relationships to such structured inquiries (as morale surveys, job satisfaction tests, etc.).

(3) These feeling variables cannot be verbalized with equal ease in response to open-ended interviewing probes, although they will bear systematic relationships to open-ended interview results.

(4) Propositions (2) and (3) hold because feelings toward organizations (much as feelings toward parents, friends and the world in general) fall

along a continuum ranging from the conscious and
easily speakable to the unconscious and difficult
to express. Rorschach blots can serve to explore
feelings falling toward the unconscious difficult-
to-express end of the continuum, although in-
evitably they also will elicit some feelings that
would be brought forth by structured methods of
inquiry and by open-ended interviews.

(5) Consistencies in response by organization members
     to Rorschach blots in organization perception
     studies provide clues concerning organization
     character, i.e. concerning pervasive character-
     istics and systematic trends in the functioning
     of the organizations studied.

(6) Consistencies in response by organization members
     to Rorschach blots in organization perception
     studies provide clues to common perceptual modes
     of the organization members, i.e. concerning
     commonalities in the psychological world
     ("phenomenological fields", "life spaces", etc.)
     of the organization members.

(7) Consistencies in organization character and
     perceptual modes characterizing different organ-
     izations provide data that may be interpreted as

criteria of organizational "goodness", particularly organizational health: i.e. measuresof adaptability/rigidity, identity/diffuseness, accuracy of perception/confusion may be derived.

In addition to the use of Rorschach blots in the study of less accessible aspects of organization perception and organizational health, the preliminary investigation has made use of two other projective devices:

(a)   free-hand drawings of "what the organization looks like to the organization members. This method typically, though not always, yields organization chart sketches, many with apparent significance for understanding of organization complexity and for the respondent's view of himself in relation to the organization as a whole; and

(b)   projective responses to a series of line drawings. These drawings are designed to tap feelings and attitudes toward formal and informal organization, the relationship between technology and human aspects, organization growth and decline, and organizational goals.

Results concerning these projective methods will
be reported separately. If we agree on the basis of
past experience in research and practical life that
people cannot, even if they want to, always speak
their minds about issues that matter, we are encouraged
to search for less obvious methods that probe unaware
and verbally-elusive processes of organizational
functioning in general and of organizational health
in particular.

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　　　　　　　Management: The Concept of
　　　　　　　Organization Health",
　　　　　　　Industrial Management Review,
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　　　　　　　D. Irwin, Inc. and Dorsey Press,
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A P P E N D I X

EXAMPLES OF SOME TENTATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

CATEGORIES: RORSCHACH ORGANIZATION PERCEPTION RESPONSES

1. Fun in a social context (e.g. dancing, congenial, laughing together)

2. a) Pleasure in an aesthetic context, not necessarily social (e.g. pleasing, like, appealing, tasteful)

   b) Displeasure in an aesthetic sense, not necessarily social (e.g. disgusting, offensive, morbid)

3. Inner tension, conflict (e.g. tied up, undercurrents, unstable, pulling apart, fighting, ..)

4. Obligation, duty, responsibility (e.g. have to be concerned, must devote time to, serve, depended upon, have to perform, have to respond, loyalty to, ..)

5. a) State of inner arrangement, orderliness (e.g. ordered, coordinated, unified, ...)

   b) State of inner disarray (e.g. chaotic, disordered, unstable, distorted, discordant, disorganized, ..)

6. Confusion - especially role (e.g. unclear, abandoned guideposts, hasn't figured out how he fits into organization, ...)

7. a) Self as powerful (e.g. find my own way around, solve problems, people manage to find a passage, deal with, put forth ideas, ...)

8. Degree and type of self-exercise or self-effort (e.g. trying to explain, trying to figure out, quitting, abandoning, trying to indicate a path through barriers, meandering, ...)

9. Personal involvement (e.g. absorbed, concerned, spend outside time, ...)

10. Meaningfulness and purposefulness in relation to own goals and values (e.g. no meaning, pointless, no sense, going somewhere, ...)

11. What I DO - functional roles and activities (e.g. work, talk, explain, coordinate, get people to do things, solve problems, respond to, report to, present, provide, get tasks done, ...)

12. a) In relationship with others (e.g. not isolated, working together, talking together, in communication with, working on a project together, laughing together, ...)

   b) Not in relationship with - cut off by others or choosing to stand off myself or separated from by the situation (e.g. inbetween formal and informal, gulf between leaders and workers, disconnected from, in the middle, lack of communication with, ...)

13. Self identity or image (e.g. superior, subordinate, the big sun, the boss, am concerned with, ...)

14. Coercion (e.g. imposed upon, forced to)

15. Competitiveness (e.g. struggling to the top, ...)